



Food and Agriculture
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United Nations



Mapping women's small-scale fisheries organizations in the Philippines: Results from assessing current capacities, gaps and opportunities to strengthen women's organizations in the sector

Applying the handbook

in support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines
for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries
in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

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Contents

Part A: Summary of present capacities and opportunities to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries organizations in the Philippines	1
‣ Overview of present organizational characteristics	1
‣ Current strengths, capacity gaps and opportunities to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries organizations	1
‣ Opportunities and proposed interventions to enhance the capacity of women's small-scale fisheries organizations	1
 Part B: Results of the Women's SSF Mapping Assessment Survey in the Philippines	 5
‣ Group location and structure	5
‣ Group age and stage of activity	5
‣ Rules	6
‣ Group characteristics: size, gender and participation	7
‣ Internal communication and meetings	8
‣ Assets	8
‣ Value chain activities	9
‣ Post-harvest processing	10
‣ Finances	11
‣ Membership benefits, group strengths and barriers to success	11
‣ External linkages	13
‣ Participation in fisheries governance and access to extension services	13
‣ Training	14
‣ Greatest needs	15
 Appendix 1. Methods	 17
‣ Background data collection	17
‣ Training	18
‣ Survey data collection	18
‣ Survey instrument	18

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Overview

To support sustainable food systems and nutrition in small-scale fisheries, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) provided funding to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to strengthen women's roles in post-harvest processing and trade. Initial support for phase one of this project focused on sub-Saharan Africa and supported activities in five countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania – with subsequent funding through the FVC mechanism allowing for expansion to include the region of Southeast Asia with support provided to activities in Indonesia and the Philippines. Around the world, women perform essential work throughout small-scale fisheries food systems, yet much of this work is overlooked. Where women are not seen or acknowledged as important actors in fish value chains, they remain underrepresented in or excluded from formal governance processes and have limited say in decision-making. This lack of visibility also hinders women's equal access to necessary extension services and assets, such as credit and technology. As part of the project "Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender equitable and climate resilient food systems and livelihoods", the decision was made to focus on strengthening women's roles in small-scale fisheries value chains to increase the quantity and quality of small fish for human consumption and trade. Besides its focus on food security and nutrition, the project aimed to help women both individually and as members of small businesses, professional organizations and cooperatives to build and improve their skills and capacity to do their work. To attain these goals, it was determined that a baseline empirical assessment of the current landscape of organizations and their primary characteristics, capacities and needs was needed as a first step.

The focus on gender equality and women's fishing organizations in the project is in line with the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). Gender equity and equality are core objectives and guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines. An entire thematic chapter (Chapter 8) in the SSF Guidelines is dedicated to this goal, outlining the right to organize and the need to support women's fishing organizations as priorities for enhancing women's access to and participation in governance and to strengthen their position within fish value chains. This chapter also foregrounds the need for alternative evaluation systems, measures and technologies appropriate to women's work in fisheries.

Through the project, survey data were used to "map" women's organizations and assess their present capacities and needs in the small-scale fisheries sector. Data collection for this study (herein referred to as the Women's SSF Mapping Assessment) focused on the coastal provinces of Misamis Occidental and Misamis Oriental in the Northern Mindanao region, with eight surveys collected between 26 April and 6 May 2022 (for a full overview of the study methods, see Appendix 1 and the methodological guide¹). Results were validated with stakeholders at the workshops on 18 and 20 October for Misamis Occidental (19 participants) and Misamis Oriental (27 participants). The workshops were attended mostly by representatives from small-scale fisheries fisherfolk organizations and women's organizations, as well as representatives from the different municipal offices, such as agriculture, planning and development, social welfare and development, nutrition, disaster risk reduction management and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquaculture Research.

1 The guide is available at www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/resources/detail/en/c/1469695.

Part A: Summary of present capacities and opportunities to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries organizations in the Philippines

Overview of present organizational characteristics

Women's small-scale fisheries groups in the Philippines are all associations that operate at the village level in the marine coastal zone. Groups currently have good governance structures and procedures in place and meet regularly, but only half are formally registered. Most groups were formed through government initiatives with the common objectives of improving their livelihoods, social welfare and gaining greater visibility with the government. All groups work with small pelagic fish, most often in post-harvest processing and trade; some work with other species such as invertebrates; and some are directly engaged in harvesting.

Current strengths, capacity gaps and opportunities to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries organizations

Strengths: Groups currently exhibit the potential to support women's fishing enterprises and participation in governance. Nearly all groups have basic administrative structures and democratic rule-making procedures in place. Groups meet regularly and have good internal information sharing. Groups believe they have been somewhat successful at achieving their objectives, and most are still focused on their formation or achieving their primary objectives. Benefits of group membership include the opportunity to engage and have a voice in decision-making, empowerment, market access and knowledge sharing. Most groups have access to some simple fish drying racks, and some also have access to fishing gear, boats and engines.

Capacity gaps: Currently, many groups need assistance in becoming registered and establishing bank accounts. Groups need assistance developing their income-earning enterprise activities (e.g. strengthening existing ones and diversifying to new ones) to be successful, and would benefit from team building and leadership trainings and support to motivate their group members. Insufficient raised drying racks and storage space limit the ability of groups to fulfil orders for fish, ensure good product quality and prevent postharvest losses.

Opportunities and proposed interventions to enhance the capacity of women's small-scale fisheries organizations

This section outlines six multi-part interventions to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries groups in the Philippines. These proposed interventions were developed based on analysis of the empirical survey results (presented in full in Part B) of the Women's SSF Mapping Assessment study. Once developed, the recommendations were shared with stakeholders and women from the small-scale fisheries sector in the Philippines at a workshop for validation: Workshop participants provided

their input on considerations for each activity, the priority level and key partners. The proposed interventions below reflect their feedback.

1) Support the formation of new groups and formalization of existing groups and their administrative capacities.

- a. Help newly formed groups become registered and establish bank accounts.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* Local government unit (LGU), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)
- b. Expand access to women's fisheries organizations by supporting the formation of new groups and through the expansion of existing groups' membership base (where desired). Government officials could help **raise awareness about the presence and benefits of groups** through communication campaigns at landing sites and by providing a set of **best practice guidelines for forming new groups**.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* Medium
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), DOLE, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), civil society organizations (CSOs)
- c. **Leadership training and team building** would help groups – especially those that are newly formed – identify and achieve their short-, medium- and long-term plans and enhance member commitment.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), FAO, CSOs

2) Enhance access to needed assets and technologies.

- a. **Enhance access to assets**, such as improved raised drying racks, dry storage space and workspace through better access to grants, subsidies and soft loans. Alternatively, centres could be created where access to some of these technologies are made accessible to multiple groups.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, DTI, FAO, CSOs

3) Provide training on business management and livelihood opportunities.

- a. **Training on income-earning activities/livelihood diversification**, so groups can expand their potential sources of income.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, DTI, FAO, CSOs

- b. **Training on business management** is needed to ensure that groups are successful in their fisheries enterprises.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, DTI, FAO, CSOs, academia

4) **Enhance connectivity among local groups and opportunities for peer learning.**

- a. **Facilitate learning exchanges** between groups (especially between younger groups and more established groups) so they can benefit from peer learning about best practices. Identify high-performing, better-established groups or group leaders to be peer trainers for newer groups.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* Medium
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, FAO, CSOs
- b. **Connect local-level groups through regional level federations. Support the development of representative, regional level groups** that can deliver needed information, services and support to existing groups to strengthen their capacities.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree. This platform would strengthen existing groups.
 - ii. *Priority level:* Medium
 - iii. *Partnerships:* BFAR, FAO, CSOs

5) **Improve access to external financial support.**

- a. **Provide/facilitate access to soft loans** for groups to purchase needed equipment and expand their businesses.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, DTI, FAO, CSOs, DA (Department of Agriculture)
- b. **Help groups identify other sources of external financial support** through non-governmental organizations, academia, microfinance institutions and other development partners.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* High
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, DTI, FAO, CSOs

6) **Improve government communication and support to groups.**

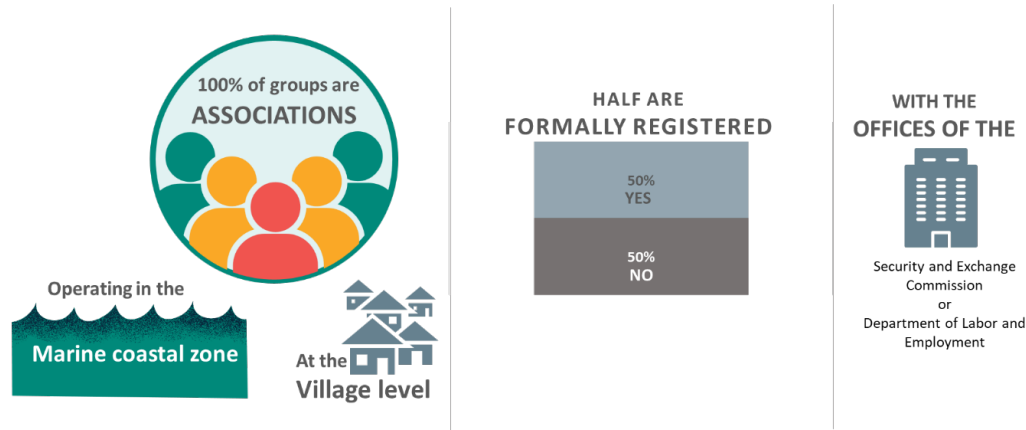
- a. **Raise awareness** within different branches of the government about the presence of women's small-scale fisheries groups (e.g. associations) and ensure they are **receiving government support through extension services**, especially **field visits**. Groups want regular contact and visits from the government, so they know they are listened to and supported.
 - i. *Feedback:* Agree
 - ii. *Priority level:* Medium
 - iii. *Partnerships:* LGU, BFAR, DTI

Part B: Results of the Women’s SSF Mapping Assessment Survey in the Philippines

Group location and structure

All women’s small-scale fisheries organizations operate in the marine coastal zone, are organized at the village level and identify as associations (Figure 1). Half of the groups surveyed are registered at present, either with the Security and Exchange Commission (3 groups) or with the Department of Labor and Employment (1 group). All groups have basic administrative structures and procedures in place, including an executive committee, meeting records or minutes, and updated membership lists; and nearly all (7 out of 8 groups) have a constitution. However, bank accounts are not a common feature (found in only 2 groups). **There are opportunities to formalize groups and help them with the registration process and assist them with establishing bank accounts.**

Figure 1. Types of organizations that represent women in fisheries and their characteristics



Group age and stage of activity

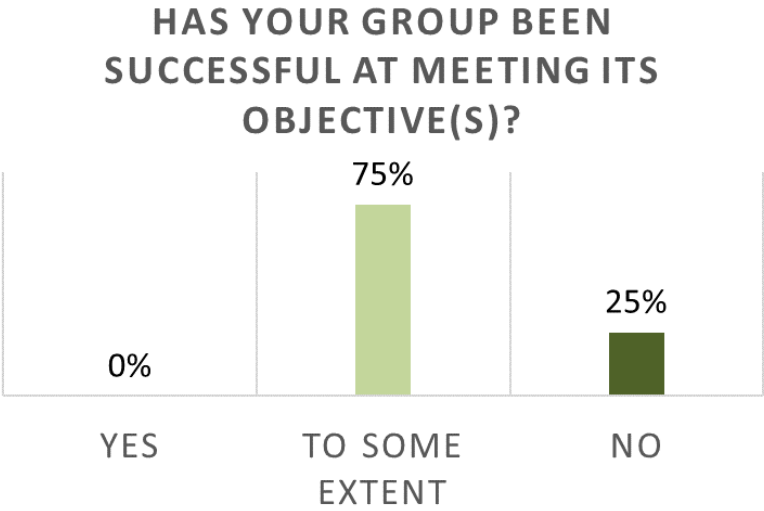
Women’s small-scale fisheries organizations vary in age, ranging from newly formed to a maximum of 20 years old with an average group age of 9 years and average time between group formation and formalization (e.g. registration) of 6 years. Most groups were formed by the government, most commonly by their local village or barangay leaders (e.g. village fisheries governance body, local council member, or barangay officials; 5 groups), followed by the district government (2 groups) and central government (1 group); one group was formed by a non-governmental organization. Groups shared common objectives, including to improve their household income (7 groups), to improve social welfare (6 groups), to seek greater visibility in relation to the government (5 groups), to participate in fisheries management (4 groups), to learn new skills (4 groups) and to access external financial support (4 groups) (see Table). Most groups consider themselves to be somewhat successful at meeting their objectives, but one-quarter of groups do not consider themselves successful (Figure 2). Most groups are still focused on their formation stage (4 groups) or on their primary objectives (3 groups); only one group is focused on new, emergent objectives. Women’s small-scale fisheries groups in the Philippines are still focused on their formation and only consider themselves to be somewhat successful at meeting

their goals, which are diverse. Organizations would benefit from leadership training to help leaders develop short-, medium- and long-term plans to help lead their groups and make progress towards their goals, adapting and evolving those goals as their needs change.

Table. **Groups’** main purpose or organizational objectives

Main purpose	Number of groups
Improve household income	7
Support social welfare	6
Greater visibility to the government	5
Participate in formal fisheries management	4
Learn new skills	4
Access to external financial support	4
Collective savings	3
Access to fish	3
Access to workspace	1
Expand trade and market access	0

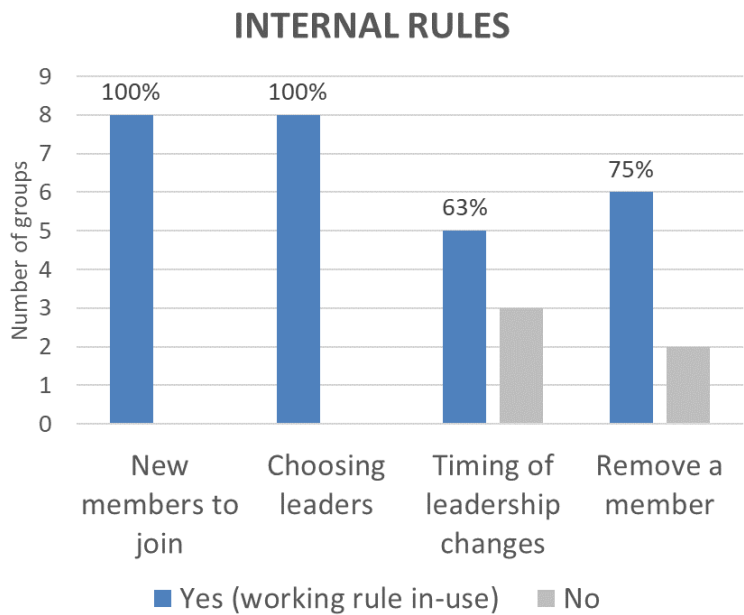
Figure 2. The degree to which groups have been successful at achieving their primary objectives



Rules

All groups have internal rules in place for admitting new members and choosing leaders, removing a member, if necessary (6 groups), and determining the timing of leadership changes (5 groups; Figure 3). Almost all groups reported that all members (executive and regular members) participate in rule creation. Groups reported that members pay their dues either all of the time (3 groups), most of the time (3 groups) or less often (2 groups). **There appears to be democratic rule-making and regular leadership changeovers in women’s small-scale fisheries groups; however, there is mixed compliance with members paying their dues and not always a rule in place about the timing of leadership changes.**

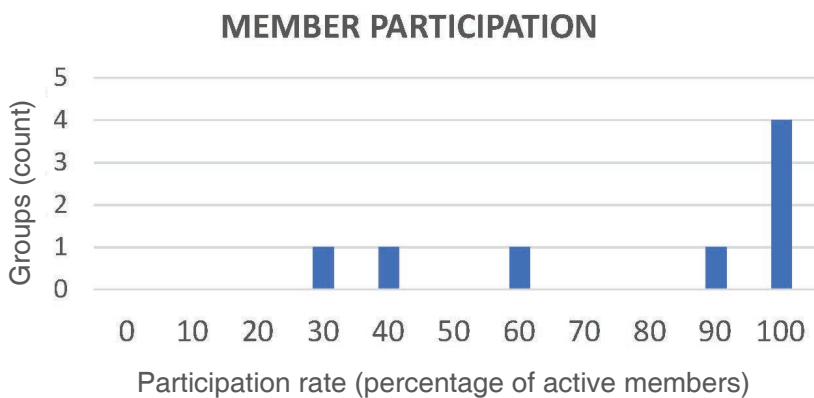
Figure 3. Presence of different types of internal rules in women’s small-scale fisheries organizations



Group characteristics: size, gender and participation

The average group size for women’s small-scale fisheries organizations is 33 members. Most groups are all women (5 groups), and the average gender composition across all groups is 83 percent women. Mixed-gender groups do not report a gendered division of labour within their group’s activities. Nearly all groups are interested in growing and adding new members, and report that they are able to find and recruit new members as desired. Member participation is high overall with an average of 77 percent of members actively engaged in their group and a median of 95 percent across all groups, but some groups are struggling with member participation, with only 30–60 percent of members active (Figure 4). Currently, groups can grow their membership, but some groups are struggling with low rates of participation among existing members.

Figure 4. Member participation rates across groups



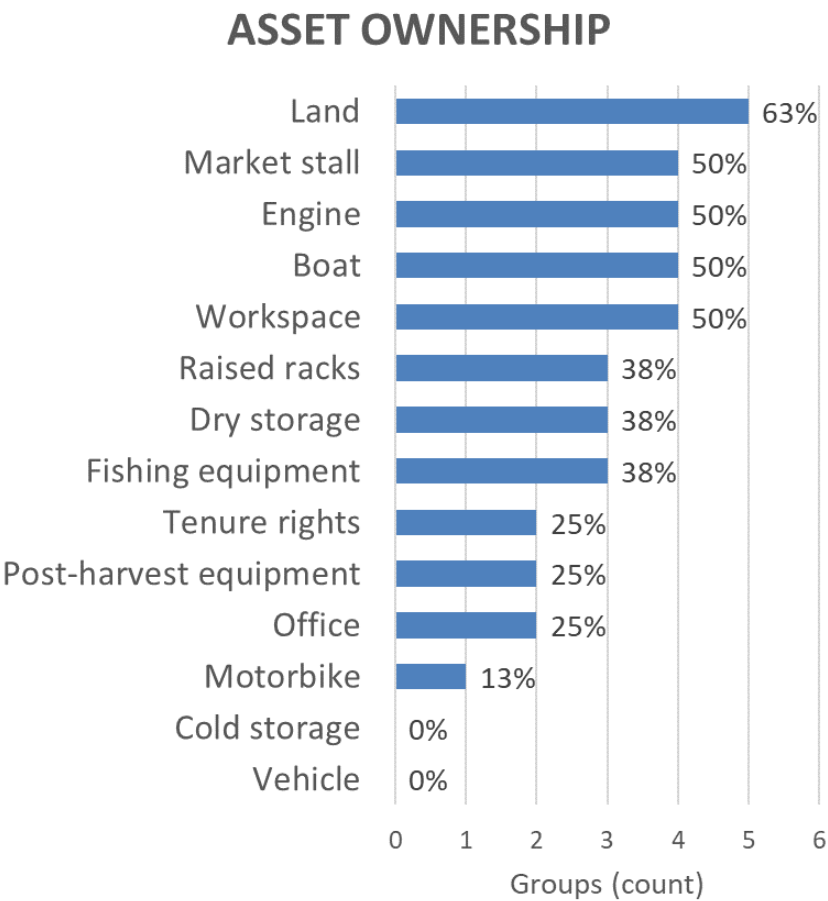
Internal communication and meetings

Strong internal communication and information sharing was reported among groups. Groups reported that information is shared “always” (7 groups) or “most of the time” (1 group) among their group members, and that this information is accessible to all members with few exceptions. Groups hold a variety of types of meetings and meet regularly. Two groups meet monthly to work together, and all groups hold regularly planned meetings (typically once a month). **Information sharing and accessibility of information are strong among groups at present. Groups meet regularly to discuss their business and their group operations and procedures.**

Assets

Groups lack access to many types of equipment needed for small-scale fisheries enterprise activities. The most common assets groups have access to are land (5 groups), market stalls (4 groups), engines (4 groups), boats (4 groups) and secure workspaces (4 groups; Figure 5). Asset ownership across groups is generally low and should be prioritized through financial and technical support.

Figure 5. Most common assets that groups have access to for their small-scale fisheries activities



Value chain activities

Most groups (6) are involved in trade of fish and fish products, followed by processing (5 groups) and direct harvesting (4 groups; Figure 6). Most groups work with small pelagic fish (7 groups), followed by invertebrates (5 groups; Figure 7a). Small pelagic fish are the most important species type for the groups' incomes (Figure 7b). Groups harvest small pelagic fish and invertebrates themselves and trade a wider variety of species types (Figure 7a). Groups typically access fish by buying directly from fishers, harvesting themselves, or from intermediaries (Figure 7c). Outlets for selling fish are dominated by local markets in the area, although groups also sell some of their pelagic fish to larger and more distant markets and to tourists or hotels (Figure 7d). **Women's small-scale fisheries groups are active in small pelagic fish and invertebrate fisheries value chains. Increased support to link these groups with more market opportunities (through information and training) could help strengthen them.**

Figure 6. Different stages of the small-scale fisheries value chain that groups are engaged in

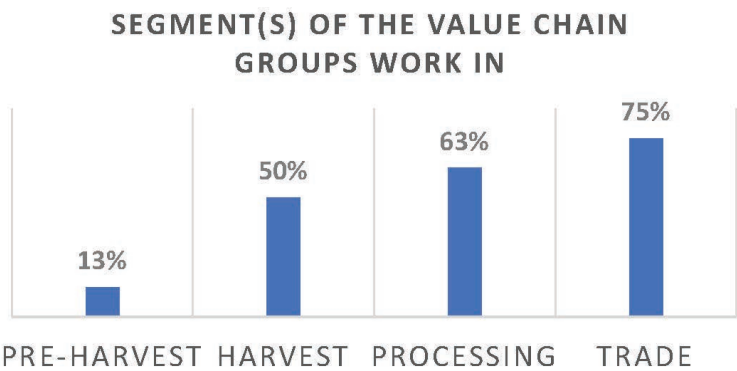
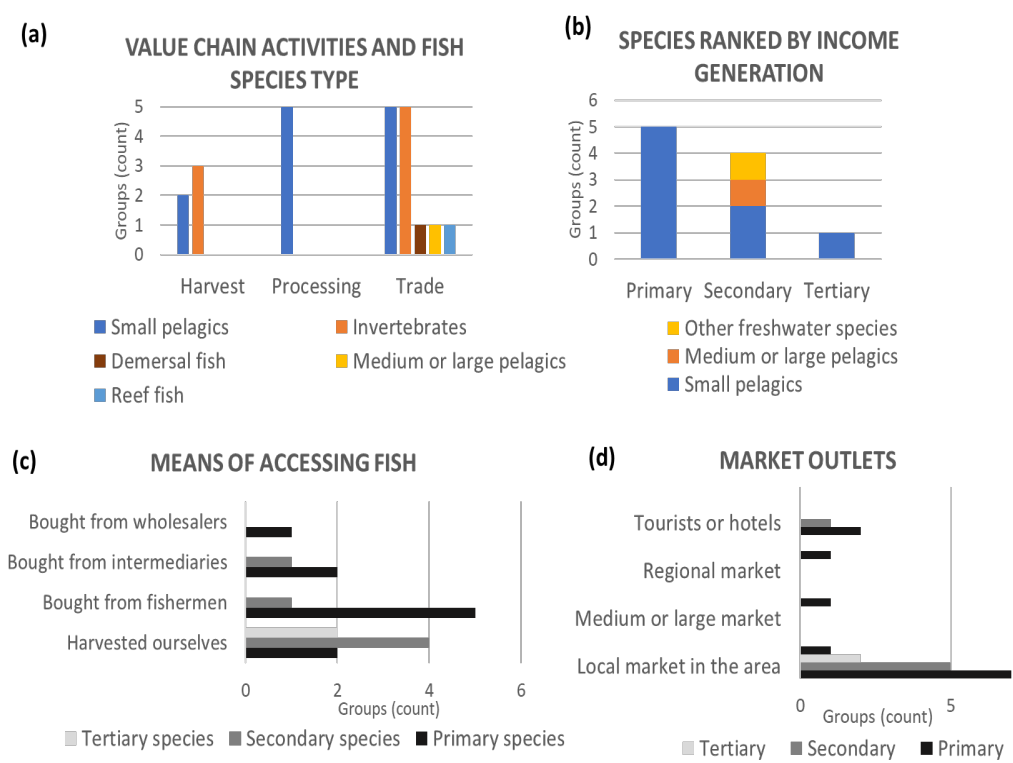


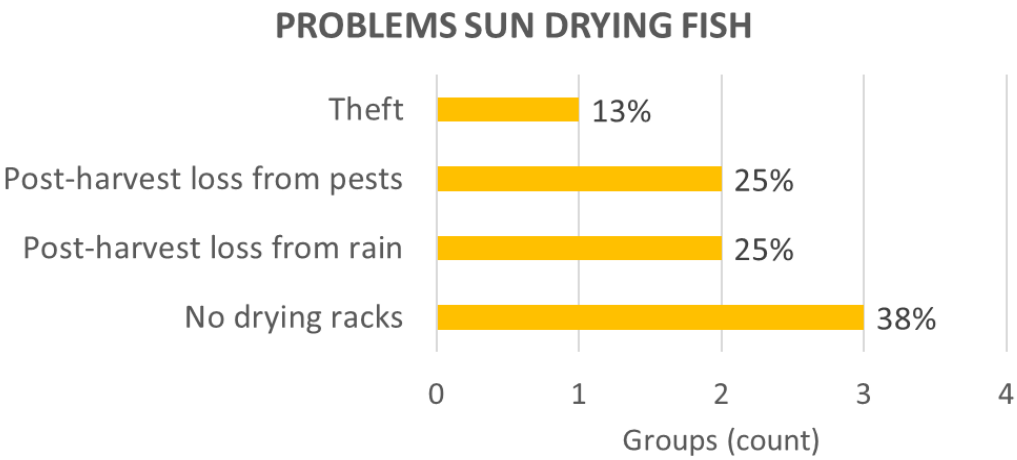
Figure 7. Different stages of the value chain groups are involved in and the main species they work with (a); the importance of each species to overall group income (b); how groups access fish (c); market outlets for selling fish (d). In charts b–d, “primary, secondary and tertiary” refer to rankings of species by importance to group income.



Post-harvest processing

In post-harvest processing, all groups dried fish using racks. However, groups lack access to high-quality raised drying racks and sufficient drying racks for drying all fish. All groups that sun dry fish experience some problems, the most common being a lack of adequate drying racks for drying fish (i.e. existing racks are insufficient in quantity and quality) and post-harvest losses from rain and pests (Figure 8). Groups are not smoking fish at present. **While most groups have access to simple drying racks, greater access to high-quality raised drying racks is needed as well as assistance to avoid post-harvest losses from rain and pests.**

Figure 8. Problems experienced when sun drying fish during post-harvest processing



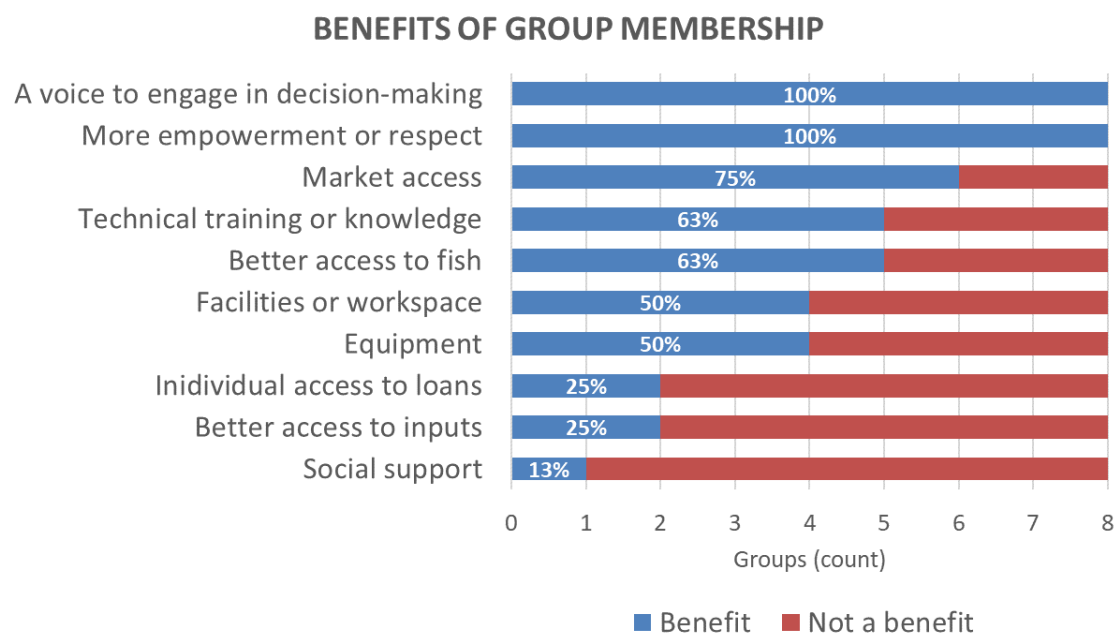
Finances

Groups vary in how they allocate profits from their fishery activities. The most common methods are for all profits to go to the group account for collective expenses or redistribution to members through future loans or dividends (3 groups); for individual members to keep profits and contribute to the group account only as needed (3 groups); or for individuals to keep their profits and contribute to the group account on a regular basis (2 groups). Total group income is generated from regular member contributions (7 groups) and the sale of fish products (3 groups). External financial support was not a significant form of group income; only one group listed it as a regular source of income. Only three groups have received some form of external financial support over the past five years, either grants (2 groups), cost sharing or subsidies (2 groups), or in-kind support (3 groups). When asked about their degree of financial dependence and sufficiency as a group, most (6 groups) said they are somewhat financially dependent on outside support, while only one group indicated that it was completely financially self-sufficient. All groups reported that financial records are available for regular members to review. **Given the young age of groups and low propensity of outside financial support received to date, better access to different types of external financial support would help establish and strengthen groups along with business development and financial management training and support.**

Membership benefits, group strengths and barriers to success

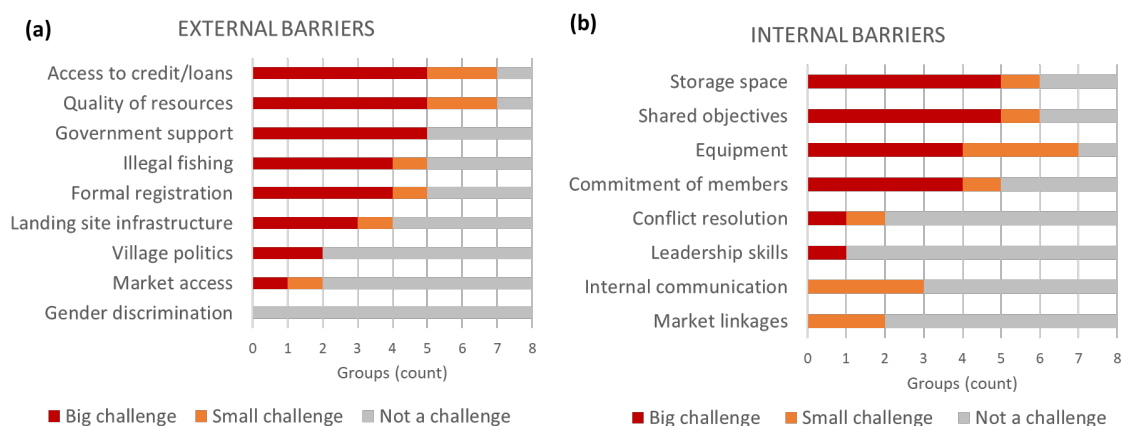
Groups indicated that members receive a variety of benefits through participation in their group. The most common benefits are having a voice to engage in decision-making, empowerment and respect, market access, technical training and knowledge, and better access to fish (Figure 9). However, access to individual loans and credit, inputs and social support were not frequently cited as benefits. Groups reported that their main strengths are strong cooperation, teamwork and an active organization; however, three groups indicated that they did not have any strengths to report. The groups' main achievements include the ability to collect member dues and build a temporary meeting place, improving livelihoods and increasing the income of members. **Groups need assistance identifying and achieving concrete accomplishments collectively to strengthen their commitment and group motivation.**

Figure 9. The different types of benefits individuals receive through membership in their group



Groups experience a variety of different types of external barriers that limit their group’s ability to function and fulfil goals, and to a lesser extent, they experience some internal barriers (meaning factors within their control, which are internal to the group). The most common significant internal barriers (i.e. reported as a “big challenge”) are inadequate storage space for storing fish products, a lack of shared objectives as a group, insufficient equipment, and issues with member commitment (Figure 10b). For some groups, conflict resolution, leadership skills and internal communication were also smaller challenges, although these were not common issues across most groups. Groups experienced a greater variety of significant external barriers, the most common being a lack of access to external financial support (e.g. credit and loans), the quality of natural resources, inadequate government support, illegal fishing, the formal registration process (i.e. becoming a registered group) and landing site infrastructure (Figure 10a). Notably, gender discrimination is not a challenge reportedly experienced by groups. **Groups face a variety of challenges, including a lack of shared objectives and team building, but many of their challenges are due to insufficient financial, technological and government support as well as environmental factors. Improved access to government support, financial resources, and equipment and storage space would strengthen groups in addition to team building trainings.**

Figure 10. How groups rate different potential internal barriers (a) and external barriers (b) that limit their capacity



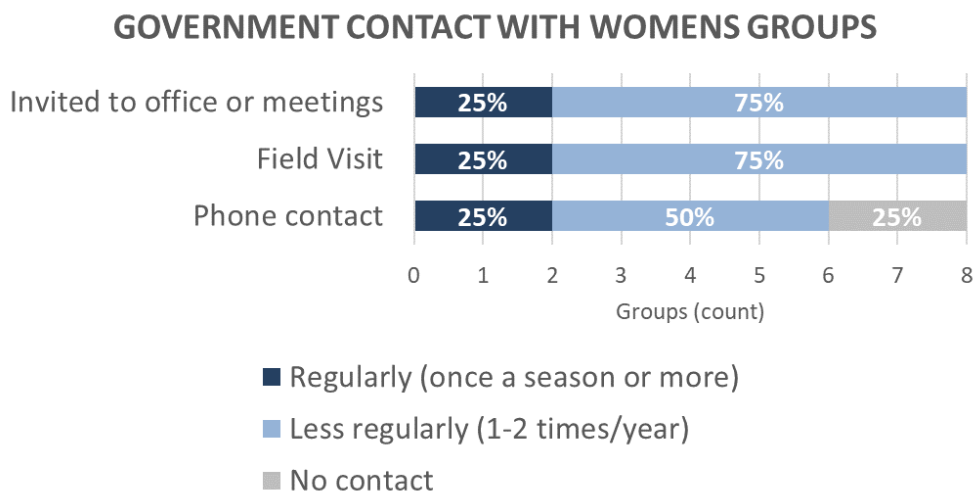
External linkages

Most groups are not currently linked to a higher-level group. One group is a member of a women's federation (which is not fisheries specific) at the provincial level, enabling it to gain access to other types of support; most (5 groups) do not want to join a higher-level group, as they do not see this as beneficial for their current organization. Only two groups have participated in a learning exchange with other groups, and none of those surveyed are in regular contact with other women's small-scale fisheries groups. **There is an opportunity to strengthen linkages among women's small-scale fisheries groups through learning exchanges, enhancing connections and channels for communication among groups, and (for those who are interested) creating opportunities for organizations to join regional federations or national advocacy groups.**

Participation in fisheries governance and access to extension services

Only one-half of groups have participated in any formal fisheries governance activities (i.e. outside of their own group governance). The most common types of formal fisheries governance activities that groups have engaged in include a formal fisheries governance consultation process (3 groups), studies of fish stocks/fishing methods (1 group) and processing methods (1 group). Most groups receive government contact for outreach services (e.g. technical support and extension services) infrequently from the government through field visits, invitations to meetings or phone contact (Figure 11). When asked about which types of contact would benefit their group through the delivery of extension services, groups mostly preferred field visits from government extension officers, followed by invitations to offices or meetings (4 groups). Currently, only three groups regularly provide annual reports of their activities to the government. **There is an opportunity to increase the frequency of technical outreach and extension services provided by the government to groups so that such contact occurs on a more regular basis (e.g. at least seasonally), particularly through field visits directly to groups.**

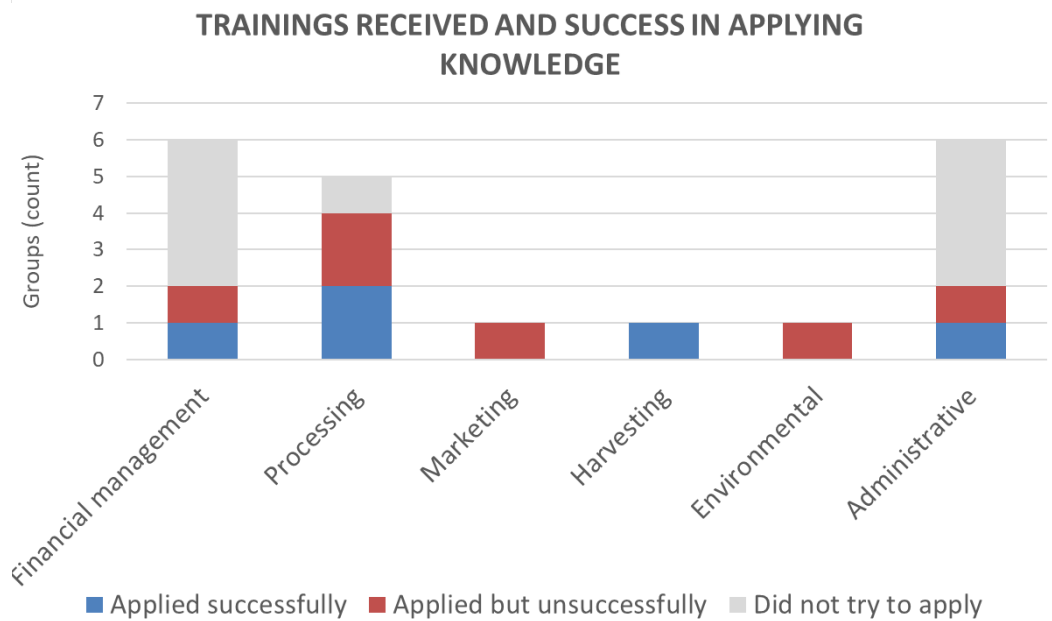
Figure 11. Current method and frequency of government outreach services (e.g. technical support and extension services) to groups



Training

Nearly all groups (7) have received some type of technical training, the most common types being trainings on financial management, administration and post-harvest processing techniques (Figure 12). However, groups have had only limited success in applying the knowledge gained through trainings; most groups have either not attempted to apply what they learned from trainings or did so unsuccessfully (Figure 12). The reasons that groups were unsuccessful or unable to apply knowledge from trainings varied. Some indicated that trainings were provided too recently to be effective. Other reasons limiting the application of knowledge included impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of workspace or inappropriate types of trainings provided for their localities. **While most groups have received some technical training, groups are struggling to apply knowledge gained for a variety of reasons. Trainings should be matched with groups’ needs and capabilities and come with technical support and follow up to ensure groups have the support they need to benefit.**

Figure 12. Different types of technical trainings groups have received and their success in applying knowledge gained through trainings



Greatest needs

The greatest need reported by groups for strengthening their capacity to do their work was financial assistance; specifically, the groups need support to improve existing income-generating activities and to explore additional enterprises and livelihood opportunities for their groups. Other needs were team building support (e.g. to increase commitment and interest and to motivate group members), improved facilities and equipment (especially storage space, facilities for drying fish and access to drying racks), and assistance with formal group registration. **Groups need assistance to become financially viable in their income-generating activities, which includes support for diversifying their income-generating activities – i.e. products produced – and assistance to improve their facilities, equipment and team building.**

Appendix 1. Methods

Background data collection

From 22 to 26 November 2021, a mission was carried out by the FAO Philippines team in the project sites to gather initial information on small-scale fisheries women's organizations. Using the guide questions developed for this initial background gathering, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources regional staff and provincial fishery officers for each province were interviewed. An initial list of organizations and base information about each were gathered; however, many organizations were not directly engaged in fisheries activities or were outside the scope of project sites, and so they were not included in the final survey. An initial list of organizations was then validated with the municipal agriculture officers and barangay (village) officers through interviews and review of existing records. Given the small number of women's fisheries groups that met the inclusion criteria for the study (see below) and were in the study area, no sampling was used in the data collection (however, the sampling protocol used in other locations is included here for reference). Instead, all eight organizations were included in the mapping assessment (Table A1).

Inclusion criteria. To be included in the survey, organizations had to meet the following criteria:

- a. The group identifies as an organization, either formally registered or informal.
- b. Membership is majority (more than 50 percent) women.
- c. Women are an active part of the organization's leadership.
- d. The majority of group members are engaged in capture fisheries and related activities, including pre-harvest, processing, and trade of fish or fish products.

Sampling protocol. The following sampling protocol was applied to the estimated number of women's small-scale fisheries groups (always rounding up to a whole number) in each landing site:

- a. Fewer than 7 organizations: do not sample (i.e. survey all groups);
- b. 8–10 organizations: sample 60 percent;
- c. 11–14 organizations: sample 50 percent;
- d. 15–20 organizations: sample 40 percent; and
- e. more than 20 organizations: sample 30 percent where possible, 20 percent as needed.

Table A1. Regions and districts where women’s small-scale fisheries groups were surveyed for the baseline study

Province	District	Number of groups
Misamis Occidental	Sinacaban	3
	Lopez Jaena	2
Misamis Oriental	Gitagum	1
	Alubijid	2
	Total	8

Training

Training for data collection was led by project consultant Richard Kadongola. Training covered the purpose and scope of the study, survey questions, and how to arrange for and facilitate surveys. All enumerators were present for an in-person, one-day training event before collecting data.

Survey data collection

Surveys were administered with two to three members from a women’s small-scale fisheries group present (including both executive committee members and regular members) and one member from the data collection team. Collectively, group members answered questions from the semi-structured questionnaire, which only related to their group level (i.e. not individual) characteristics. Surveys took 1–2 hours to complete and were administered outdoors to allow for social distancing due to the pandemic. Respondents were introduced to the purpose of the survey and asked for their consent before proceeding; they were also informed of their right to skip any question or end the interview at any time. Data were collected digitally with a smartphone or tablet, using the free software KoboToolbox and the app KoboCollect to record responses.

Survey instrument

The survey included informed consent language. After consent was granted, the enumerators guided participants through questions about their group’s history and formation, their objectives, their internal operations (e.g. rules, information sharing, meetings, participation rates, financial structure), external support received, external linkages, barriers and their greatest needs. To review the survey’s development and the survey instrument in full, see the FAO report *A Methodological Guide for Mapping Women’s Small-Scale Fishery Organizations to Assess Their Capacities and Needs*.

Globally, women perform essential work throughout small-scale fisheries (SSF) food systems, yet much of this work is overlooked. Where women are not seen or acknowledged as important actors in fish value chains, they remain underrepresented in or excluded from formal governance processes and have limited say in decision-making. This lack of visibility hinders women's equal access to needed extension services and assets, such as credit and technology. Forming organizations (e.g., associations, cooperatives, savings, and credit groups) is one means of adapting to gender-specific challenges women face in the sector. Recent high-level commitments outline achieving women's full and effective participation in decision-making and leadership as global governance goals. For example, the dedicated chapter on gender in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) encourages women's participation in fisheries organizations and their inclusion in monitoring and implementation. In addition, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality includes a target on ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. But while enhanced access to organizations and decision-making spaces for women is critical for achieving global goals, current research on women's SSF organizations is lacking, leaving gaps in our understanding of existing barriers and opportunities to affect change.

The report provides a national overview of women's SSF organizations, defined as formal and informal organizations engaged in fisheries activities (including pre-harvest, harvest, or post-harvest processing and trade) whose leaders and members are majority women. The study of women's SSF organizations was part of a broader initiative, "Empowering women in SSF for sustainable food systems," through funding provided by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). To support sustainable food systems and nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa, NORAD provided funding for initial project activities in five countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. With a focus on strengthening women's roles in post-harvest processing and trade, the project aimed to help women both individually and as members of small businesses, professional organizations, and cooperatives to build and improve their skills and capacity to do their work. To attain these goals, an initial empirical assessment of the current landscape of organizations was undertaken as a first step. The report summarizes the results of the mapping assessment survey of women's SSF fisheries organizations carried out, and underscores the diversity of women's fisheries organizations and their present accomplishments and opportunities for governments, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private sector actors to support women's SSF organizations in line with the principles of the SSF Guidelines. For an overview of the methodology, see 'A methodological guide for mapping women's SSF organizations to assess their capacities and needs'.

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